

NEWS RELEASE

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Seven Charged with Multi-kilo Cocaine and Methamphetamine Distribution Conspiracy

Peoria, IL -- The United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, Jan Paul Miller, announced today that a federal grand jury in Peoria has returned an indictment charging seven defendants with conspiring to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and more than 500 grams of methamphetamine in west central Illinois. Those charged by indictment are:

Kevin G. Hutchings, age 47; Kevin M. Hutchings, 33; Lois Chicknowsky, 68; all of Texas; Nelson Eric Whiting, 57, of rural Fulton county, Illinois; Michael Harris, 53; Richard Breeding, 60; and Michael Cole, 48, of Tazewell county, Illinois.

The indictment in this case was returned by the grand jury on August 19, 2005, but had remained sealed pending the defendants' arrests and appearances in federal court. Whiting, Breeding, and Cole were arrested and made their initial appearances before U.S. Magistrate John A. Gorman yesterday, August 23, 2005, in Peoria. Cole was released on bond pending trial; detention hearings for Whiting and Breeding are scheduled for Friday, August 26, 2005. Kevin G. Hutchings is currently in federal custody in another district pending transfer to Illinois. Kevin M. Hutchings, Harris and Chicknowsky have not been arrested at this time.

The indictment alleges the seven defendants conspired together and with others to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine and more than 500 grams of methamphetamine in Peoria, Tazewell and Fulton counties from 2001 to in or about 2003. Kevin G. Hutchings allegedly obtained meth and cocaine in the western United States and transported it to the Central District of Illinois.

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The indictment alleges that his son, Kevin M. Hutchings, and Lois Chicknowsky transported drugs for the elder Hutchings and assisted him in the transportation of drugs to central Illinois. Harris, Whiting, Breeding and Cole allegedly received the drugs, weighed and repackaged them, and gave the drugs to others to distribute and distributed the drugs themselves.

In addition to the conspiracy charge, Whiting is charged with four counts of distribution of methamphetamine in Fulton county, Illinois: on July 1, 2003; July 18, 2003; October 8, 2003; and, October 16, 2003. Another defendant, Michael Harris, faces one count of distribution of cocaine in Tazewell county, Illinois, on November 13, 2003, in addition to the conspiracy charge.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

U.S. Attorney Miller said, "Working with local, state and federal law enforcement, the U.S. Attorney's Office has effectively used the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program to disrupt and dismantle numerous drug organizations throughout central Illinois. With these cooperative task forces, central Illinois law enforcement agencies have demonstrated their uncompromising resolve to aggressively investigate and prosecute those who engage in the distribution of cocaine and meth in central Illinois."

Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent in Charge Richard Sanders stated, "Through cooperative efforts such as this, we are turning up the heat on methamphetamine manufacturers and distributors nationwide. This is yet another example of aggressive enforcement and prosecution."

If convicted, the offense of conspiracy to distribute more than 500 grams of methamphetamine and five kilograms or more of a substance containing cocaine carries a statutory penalty of a mandatory minimum ten years to life imprisonment and a fine of up to \$4,000,000. With one prior felony drug conviction, the mandatory minimum statutory penalty increases to 20 years to life imprisonment; with two or more prior felony drug convictions, the penalty is life imprisonment.

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For each offense of distribution of methamphetamine or cocaine, the statutory penalty is up to 20 years in prison and a fine of \$1,000,000; with one or more prior felony drug convictions, the penalty is up to 30 years imprisonment and a fine of \$2,000,000.

Fulton county Sheriff Dan Daly said, “For years, Fulton county law enforcement has enjoyed a good working relationship with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in shutting down some serious drug offenders here. I am pleased that this cooperative effort has resulted in the arrest and prosecution of Nelson Eric Whiting, an alleged drug distributor in Fulton county. Many times, the US. Attorney’s Office has been able to use its resources to obtain lengthy sentences for drug offenders that would not have been possible in state court.”

The charges are the result of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration, the West Central Illinois Task Force, the Fulton County Sheriff’s Department, and the Illinois State Police. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Tate Chambers.

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